

Lighting The Road To The Future

New Orleans

Data

News Weekly

"The People's Paper"

Asante Award Highlights

Data Zone

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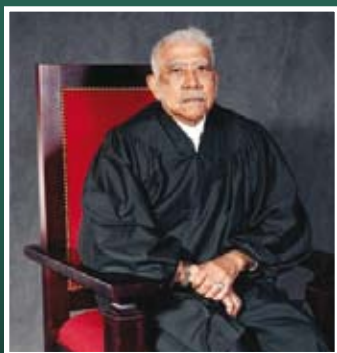
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Data News Weekly In-Depth Exclusive

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Oliver Thomas: Rebirth... Reflections and the Road to Redemption

Oliver Thomas is a man who cuts a striking presence; he is affable, likable and charismatic. He was the rare politician who had respect from the streets to the business elite. Less than four years ago he lived a charmed life as President of the New Orleans City Council and one

bright as the sun. He is optimistic about where his life is now and moving ahead to the future, "I've always been 'the glass is half full' kind of person," says Thomas. "Even if the sun is not shining I know it's shining somewhere even if it's not shining on the outside it's shining on the

inside. But you know tragedy, pain and suffering they challenge those thoughts; I'm no different than no one else when I go through my heartaches and pain, my ups and downs especially being incarcerated. I did something wrong and it made me examine my character," explains Thomas.

While incarcerated Thomas says that people from the community still showed an outpouring of love and he feels good as he begins his road to redemption, "Early

on, in the beginning I could not read the good mail, and I received 1000 pieces of mail in 2 years and four months," says Thomas. "At first I felt like I wasn't worthy. I had people write me and say we are upset with what you did, you let us down, but we love you and can't wait for you to come back, whatever you need we are here to help you. But early on, I could not see that, because I was not ready yet, but since I've been home that love has continued."

Recently, there was a "welcome home party" where a cross section of people from the community came to show their love and support for Thomas. He says of the celebration, "The love has been tre-

mendous, at the "welcome home party" to have over three hundred people was very humbling to me, I almost came to tears a few times to know that people have that kind of love for you after you let them down or made a mistake. It's what being human or a child of God is all about and regardless of what people say about this City they exhibited that," remarks Thomas.

A Journey Through Life

Thomas has come a long way since growing up in the Lower Ninth Ward. He has met heads of state, and ascended to one of the highest offices in city electoral politics, been on the stage as an actor and has been a loving husband and father. He reflects on his early life; one of humble economic circumstances, but filled with love and the things that have shaped the man he has become saying, "I always wondered why my mother and father didn't make a lot of money, when I was young I wondered why we had to live in a house with one bedroom that my parents used and my sister and I slept in the living room. As I got older I wondered why so many people in my community didn't have work or why they struggled." Speaking of the broadening of his horizons he says, "As the result of sports I was able to travel, I was able to stay with other families who were from different cultures who both had good jobs; they both had cars all the kids had their own rooms." With a smile he continues reminiscing about his childhood, "As a young man growing up in the Lower Ninth Ward we were jealous of our friends who stayed in the Desire Projects because they were famous for their three and four bedroom apartments. I use to be like "wow" what it would be like to have my own room."

He says one event that took place in his life that played a part in shaping his



Today, Oliver Thomas is working at Covenant House giving young people hope and inspiring them as Director of Community Relations and Advocacy.

By Edwin Buggage
Photos By Glenn Summers

who was well liked across the Crescent City. Then in a scandal that rocked City Hall, Thomas was convicted of accepting a bribe from businessman Stanford "Pampy" Barre. Suddenly, the man who was once thought of as a "shoe in" for the mayor's seat in 2010 would be serving a prison sentence. Today after serving nearly a two and a half year prison sentence Thomas sat down with Data News Weekly in an exclusive interview and shared some of his most intimate thoughts.

A New Day

As we were greeted by Oliver Thomas on this rainy morning his smile shines as

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love for his City and community was Hurricane Betsy, "I experienced Hurricane Betsy as a kid, a lot of people asked why did I do what I did during Hurricane Katrina, why did I stay and was so involved? Because I am a Betsy child, we waited to be rescued and when we were rescued my father and uncle stayed behind while we lived in a shelter. I saw my dad stay with nine feet of water in the second floor of a house."

As Thomas stood on the frontlines of a city sinking into the abyss and chaos running rampant he says many of the unsung heroes of Katrina were the courageous women in leadership in the City of New Orleans and former Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. "I don't think Governor Kathleen Blanco got the credit she deserved for her part for what she did during Katrina, a lot of what she did was taken out of context. Two things I remember as I was in the room with her one was when she was talking to the President about honoring her request for troops and the National Guard because she had done that already. She's asking when are you going to sign off." Then Thomas mentions a conversation he had with the then Governor, "She said, she did not want to get into a fight with the President and even told me that maintaining a good relationship with the President was more important and being hopeful that they want to help is more important than her political career." He also spoke about 'Cynthia Willard- Lewis, Cynthia Hedge-Morrell, Jackie Clarkson, and Renee Pratt we were basically troops on the ground, those women were amazing," says Thomas.

One of the things that have come to occupy a place in the mind of Thomas and so many New Orleanians is Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. He talks of how it impacted his family and his life as he was torn between leaving the two things he loves the most, his family and his City. "Once I knew they were safe I stayed, I wish I could have been in both places, but during Katrina in this town people were suffering, people were drowning; people were floating in the water," recalls Thomas. "And to this day, I remember where the bodies were, seeing them." He continues saying how shameful it was that this was allowed to happen in the U.S. "They didn't have any place to take the bodies; we were told to leave them where they were, in an American City, I watched one body stay on the streets for three weeks in an American City; sometimes I still go to bed at night, and I see three distinct bodies in three different places." And of the fourth he says, his voice hitting a somber note saying, "It was a sad day several months later I remember finding my brother dead in a hotel room. He just said, he didn't feel good and could not go out to help us that day, these are times I can never forget and they changed my life forever."

From Purgatory to Redemption

As a person looks at life behind bars the one thing that all inmates have in com-

mon is "time". And there are decisions one needs to make as far as how to make the best of the time whether it is how to cope or how to find hope for a life that has been extremely altered. In the case of Oliver Thomas, it is one of a man who was a well-loved figure with his best days ahead of him suddenly finds himself serving a prison sentence. This kind of thing can drive someone into the depths of depression and self-pity. Thomas talks of this time in his life, "At first I was feeling sorry for myself thinking how could I be in this position, and had this 'woe is me' attitude," says Thomas of his feeling during the beginning of his prison sentence, "It must have lasted almost a year that I would feel this way."

Thomas talks that at times he felt alone, "It was hard especially around holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas it really messed with me. We are so conditioned that these times are for families, when, in fact, at all times we should celebrate our loved ones. My mind really started to mess with me I was feeling lonely and down on myself."

Recounting the loneliness he says of prison existence, he feels, it is important that the loved ones of those who are incarcerated stay connected. He talks of how those who did not receive visits or letters would try to cope, "I use to see brothers who didn't get visits dress up to wait in line and live vicariously through us, brothers who didn't receive mail would ask if can they get the mail for you, so they would feel like they were getting mail. So, I let brothers get my mail for me."

He says that some of his fellow inmates helped him cope with his time in prison, and assisted him down the road to look at his situation in a new light. "I had other inmates Hakim Kashif, Ben Hollingsworth, and the late George Brown who I saw die in prison; I watched him die. I didn't know if he would live but he didn't have to die as quick as he did, as a young man 35 years old. Recounting and recognizing the men who took him from the road of purgatory to the beginning of redemption he says, "Those guys embraced me, sometimes we meet people who see more in us than we see in ourselves and that happens usually twice in our lives; it's when you're young and have potential or when you have gone through something. There were men who had thirty to forty years and big George just had a few years, but they saw a light in me that was dimmed. Once I got through this 'woe is me' pitiful kind of state, those brothers said, man let's get to work find out how you're going to use this time to get better."

During this time he also talks of how his creativity helped him understand what was going on inside of him in reflecting on his life, "My art is one of the things that I used to cope; I could write about the most painful and funny stuff and look at it and it was therapeutic for me," says Thomas. "I would write about how I thought about the pain of loneliness of prison life."

He talks of writing about situations that

mirrored and were metaphors for his life, "I remember writing a piece called falling leaf, 'I watched the leaf as it fell to the ground, but I never watched a leaf before, but this time watching that leaf fall it meant so much more because it represented my

the city more sustainable and build for the future where the city could prosper." Continuing he says, "There are three groups that need to be empowered in this city moving forward and that is women, children and African-Americans - the door has



Data News Weekly Editor Edwin Buggage interviews Oliver Thomas

life; a life that was once filled with prospects and gains, from watching that leaf fall now represented life falling in pain." Saying of his art and the men who helped him discover the silver lining behind the clouds he says, "I was able to use this artistic side to help me. And the brothers in prison would allow me to do poetry on prison programs and MC. It was almost as if God was working through them saying we know you want to be pitiful, but we are going to put you to work."

New Orleans Future in Black and White

After spending 13 years as an elected official Thomas has a bird's eye view of what is going on in politics and in the city. After Hurricane Katrina and the levee breach a social breach in the city took place. The continuing racial divide has dominated the political discourse of the last five years. New Orleans stands now as a further racially polarized city. Thomas was one of the few local politicians who navigated easily in all the communities of New Orleans.

"I've always been someone who thinks outside the box, I've always been well read and now better read since being in prison. It's not about White or Black, is there racism absolutely? Are there racist people yes, but most people are not? Most people are trying to take care of their thing and their stuff; I don't care if there were Martians as Mayor or City Council as long as things worked for our community. I think too often people focus on who's in charge instead of their policies and how they operate," Thomas says of the political climate stressing that effective government that works for the people is more important than race.

Thomas believes growing the economic pie is important in the future of the city, "It is less about the Black or White, it's about what's wrong or right. It's about having a strong business class and middle class and all people working together to make

to be opened for them to enter the economic mainstream and if that doesn't happen then the results will be more tragic and it doesn't matter who is in charge."

What's The Meaning of Life?

In our journey through life we all come to a moment where we ask ourselves, why are we here and what is our purpose? For Thomas it is his family, his God and his City, "My wife, Angelle and my daughter, Leah are the most important people in my life and I could have never made it through without them, my life is about them and being there in every way I can," says Thomas. "My daughter and my wife are my heroes, they are still victims of the process, they still had to work, my wife had to hold it down and raise my daughter while I was gone."

He says, he is still trying to transition back into his family life. "I understand my family had to go on with their day to day lives while I was away and I have to now work my way back into their lives because now I have to readjust and try to fit into where they are now," says Thomas. As the holidays near Thomas worries as this is his first holiday back with his family, "I would hope they have forgiven me and are comfortable enough to include me in their Thanksgiving and Christmas, like the ones they had when I was here."

Upbeat about his future he says, the sky is the limit, "I am going to let God help guide me. I love doing my community work, I am going to continue looking for opportunities to help my community. I am going to try my hand in business and continue to try to be a good husband and father and a friend to this community." He talks about his undying love of the citizens, "I love people in this City but I think in some instances we are missing the boat. We really need to remind people how special they are in spite of the Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane FEMA and Hurricane

Continued on page 4.

US Attorney General Holder Keynotes Dillard University's Inaugural Ortique Lecture on Law and Society

By Vincent Sylvain
Photos by Larry Panna

Mock Trial Center bears the name of New Orleans' Civil Rights Legend Justice Revis O. Ortique, Jr.; first African-American elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

On Thursday, November 11, 2010, Dillard University honored a distinguished alumnus and former university trustee, Justice Revis O. Ortique, Jr., by dedicating in his name the Mock Trial Center in the new Professional Schools and Sciences Building on campus. To commemorate the occasion, the Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr., Attorney General of the United States, delivered the keynote address for the Inaugural Justice Revis O. Ortique, Jr. Public Affairs Lecture on Law and Society.

"Although most knew Justice Ortique for his many accomplishments—civil rights warrior, counselor to five presidents, the first African-American Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court

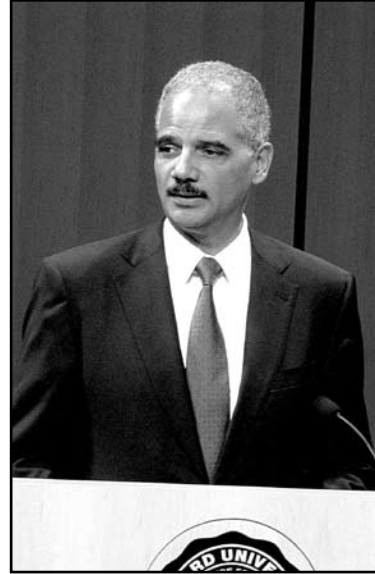


The late-Justice Revis O. Ortique, Jr., Louisiana Supreme Court
Photo by Jim Thomas

— we knew Justice Ortique best for his loyalty and commitment to his alma mater," said Dillard University President Dr. Marvalene Hughes. "He inspired all of us and we are pleased to have yet

another opportunity to recognize him for his many contributions to his 'fair' Dillard," she said.

"The Mock Trial Center will be beneficial for not only students at Dillard University, but also for the



US Attorney General Eric Holder delivered the keynote address for the Inaugural Justice Revis O. Ortique, Jr. Public Affairs Lecture on Law and Society Photo by Larry Panna

entire community," said Miriam V. Ortique, wife of Justice Ortique. "The family is honored to have this center dedicated to Revis. He was always so interested in education; this mock trial cen-

ter is a perfect legacy to honor his name," she said.

A pioneering civil rights activist for more than 60 years, Revis O. Ortique, Jr. was the first African-American elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court. As an attorney and judge, he engaged in many landmark decisions, and had a national reputation for fairness and integrity. He served five U.S. presidents, and held numerous national leadership positions, including President of the National Bar Association. He served his community as the President of the Louis A. Martinet Society, as a member of the Louisiana Ethics Board, and as Chairman of the New Orleans Aviation Board. Justice Ortique earned a Master's of Arts from Indiana University and a Juris Doctorate from Southern University in Baton Rouge. The Justice Revis O. Ortique, Jr. Chair in Political Science and Social Justice at Dillard is valued at \$1 million.

Cover Story, Continued from page 3.

the Corps of Engineers, in spite of all these hurricanes the people are resilient and they still rebuild, they're still hopeful, they're still prayerful. They are special and every day we need to remind them of that."

Thomas talks of his love for the City, but feels too often citizens and leaders always focus on what is negative and not the positives or the possibilities of the city. "We tell our City everyday what it can't be, how violent, how poor it is, why we are surprised when they say yeah you're right. Johnnie Cochran said, "garbage in, garbage out" and this is what we feed our community everyday. It's time to begin uplifting our City and moving ourselves in a more positive direction and live our lives with a more positive outlook and focus on what's good about our City and how we can make it better."

Sacred Covenant

While no longer on the City Council Thomas is still involved in helping the community. His passion is young people, and today he is working at Covenant

House giving young people hope and inspiring them. "I am the Director of Community Relations and Advocacy at Covenant House. There is a serious problem with homeless teens in this city. We provide mental health counseling, healthcare, pastoral support; in addition to other services. We have kids as young as 16." Thomas speaks of the need for more assistance, "Louisiana is 49th in the well-being of children. We have more neglect, and most of the monies spent on young people are spent on incarceration, not rehabilitation, or intervention or deterrents when we deal with young people in this way we are adding to the problems. We have too many children who are being taught how to simply survive but not how to live."

He is giving his time to be a voice. Continuing to be an advocate of those who are voiceless and sometimes feeling hopeless. "You know what I tell kids I see every day that has been battered, abused, and feeling like nobody loves them. I tell them all that is real but when you overcome that, how much sweeter it is for you, you can say my mother neglected me, my father abandoned me, no-

body wants me, I have been addicted to things, I was sexually abused, but now I am a success. And when you right your life in spite of all that, you are the greatest winner in the world; it can't get any better than that. And who cares if some people don't want to give you a second chance or didn't want to give you an opportunity, you succeed in spite of it. You have re-directed your life and gave yourself a second chance."

Reflections and Rebirth

Oliver Thomas has been on the political stage for over a decade, but he has also taken to the stage with critical acclaim as an actor. Today, he wants to use his life as a teachable moment and is working with Anthony Bean on a play entitled "Reflections" that chronicles his life and will be premiering in January of 2011. He says of the play, "It will show people whatever it is you go through that you can make it, that you can be triumphant." Saying how overwrought he was with emotion during pre-production, "My wife told me it would be painful, sitting down going through these notes, I thought I was emotionally through with all these things but

I've found myself shedding tears sitting with Anthony; some of the pain is still there, so think about some of the people that's served 10-15 years."

He says, revisiting his writings has been helpful and he hopes the production can inspire people that you can give yourself a second chance in life; and yes you can fall but you can get up and live and not just survive but thrive again, "It has been therapeutic working on "Reflections", I am looking forward to it. I am going to laugh and cry, I am going to share some things about life, love and relationships, success and failure that people never knew about me but that all of us go through and I am going to do my best to keep my composure."

He says of his City and its rebirth and renaissance that it is going to take all people working together to overcome. To give our City a chance to be what it could be. "You are the greatest people in the world with the greatest culture in the world. Let's all work together not just look to the Mayor or the City Council, not just look to the President. Let's look towards each other. Let's begin to look into each other's hearts and

soul, and talk about the things we can do to make this city a better place. Yes, we have problems but it is up to us to make it better. The struggle is just a step to the ladder of salvation, rung number one pain, (rung is a rod or bar forming the step of a ladder), rung number two suffering, rung number three neglect, it could be racism, sexism, or poverty but you keep climbing and when you get to the top you have a place of redemption and success. You weren't afraid to get on these rungs and you have reached your personal top and become the best person you could be."

As the interview concludes we walk with Oliver Thomas as Glenn Summers shoots random photos of him at Covenant House where he is greeted by well-wishers. We soon get to the gated exit of the building and Thomas smiles brightly because for him this is the beginning of a new day. By this time, the rain has stopped and the sun is beginning to appear from behind the clouds, and Oliver Thomas walks away on his road to redemption.

Asante Awards Festival

A Special Tribute to New Orleans Finest

By: Dionne Character

Saturday, November 13, 2010 marked the 3rd year celebration of the Asante Awards, which was held at Household of Faith Church in East New Orleans.

Many were honored, as the dream of Founder, Lawrence Martin continues in honoring the rich history of New Orleansians in celebrating the myriad of talented individuals, who have contributed to the culture of music, food, and business, making our City a gumbo of its own.

As guests arrived, they were treated with VIP service, in a beautiful setting with an ice sculpture, music and some of the best creole food. I had a chance to speak with one of the honorees, Blues Great, Ernie Vincent, who said "I enjoyed the ambiance and the sincerity of the evening."



Asante means "Thank You" and what better way to say it, than to honor those who have paved the way for many. Some of the categories were Culinary, Sports, Hall of Fame, Music, Unsung Heroes, and Business, with a special thanks to the Gospel Mass Choir, which included Franklin Avenue Baptist Church and St. Peter Claver Catholic Church.

Lloyd Dillon, Donna Stallworth,



Wayne Baquet, Lance Ellis, 7th Ward Shorty, Rickey Jackson, Angela Bell, Detroit Brooks, Ernie Vincent, and Pastor Antoine Barriere to name a few, were some of the recipients to receive an award for their contributions in the community.

The celebration was hosted by none other than the new voice of the South, Actor, and Host, Gralin Banks, who was



last seen in Spike Lee's, "If God Is Willing And Da Creek Don't Rise."

Next year's salute will be to "Brass Bands", as I am sure the event will be another extraordinary event to attend. For more information on The Asante Foundation visit www.asanteusa.org.

Dionne Character can be reached at www.dionnecharacter.com



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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Data Around Town

Welcome Home Oliver!

Friends and family gathered to celebrate an official Homecoming for Oliver Thomas, and Data was there!



Wedding Bells Ring!

Eldridge and Sierra Randolph, III said their "I Do's" surrounded by loved ones and then had one great reception, and Data was there!





"Now Gulf seafood is coming back on the menu, so come on down, we're open for business."

*Bryan Zar
Co-owner, Restaurant des Familles
Crown Point, LA*

Making This Right

Beaches

Claims

Cleanup

Economic Investment

Environmental Restoration

Health and Safety

Wildlife

I grew up bussing tables at this restaurant. Last year, my wife, Brooke, and I bought it. We were working hard to build a business, then the spill hit. BP said they would try to make things right. But how was an energy company going to help our restaurant?

Keeping Businesses Open

We figured they would tell us to take a number and wait in line. Instead, they asked us if we could serve food to the workers, engineers, scientists, and local residents they had hired to cleanup the spill. It kept us busy round the clock. And we weren't the only ones. They hired a lot of local businesses and kept a lot of people working. They have kept businesses up and down the Gulf open and it's still making a difference.

Open for Business

BP asked us to share our story with you to keep you informed. Our restaurant's open six days a week. Customers are filling our restaurant again and we think it's a good time to come down to the Gulf Coast. And if we could make just one request, please think of us when planning your next vacation. We're still here and while it's been tough, we are still cooking. And we are just one of the hundreds of great places ready to welcome you when you come down. So don't wait. We're looking forward to seeing you.

For information visit: bp.com
restorethegulf.gov
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For assistance, please call:
To report impacted wildlife: (866) 557-1401
To report oil on the shoreline: (866) 448-5816
To make spill-related claims: (800) 440-0858
louisianagulfresponse.com



DNC Abandons Black Voters and Loses the House



By Danny J. Bakewell Sr.
Chairman of NNPA

Too little, Too late

At the funeral of former Democratic National Committee Chairman Ronald Brown, President Bill Clinton made an announcement stunning to some but obvious to us. And, that was had it not been for the Black vote, he would not have been elected president in 1992 and re-elected in 1996.

In the recent critically important mid-term elections, officials of the Democratic National Committee either ignored this political fact or simply took the Black vote for granted. The results were a disaster for Democratic house members.

Why did the Democratic National Com-

mittee fail to mobilize and maximize the Black vote in the mid-term elections? This is a salient question because it is, or should be, obvious that in a close election the turnout of Black voters will be the difference between victory and defeat.

One answer to this question is the fact that the Democratic National Committee invests the bulk of its resources in reaching out to voters it was unlikely to get and didn't get while largely ignoring the most loyal and traditional base of the party, Black voters.

It's not as if another path wasn't suggested. I personally, on behalf of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (Black Press of America) and our more than 200 Black Publishers nationally, produced proposals for aggressively reaching the Black voter nationally. However, despite my discussions with DNC Chairman Tim Kaine, he and his DNC trusted minions turned their backs on us (the NNPA) and Black voters.

The only support we could count on was DNC Political Director, Clyde Williams, who respected and understood the value of the NNPA advertising campaign, White House Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett and other advocates such as Congressional Black Caucus Chair, Barbara Lee, Speaker

Nancy Pelosi, Democratic House Whip James Clyburn, Rev. Al Sharpton, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and National Urban League President Marc Morial.

However, the DNC staff followed their own ways—a little here, a little there, but not enough to make a significant difference and far too late.

Teaching voters is a complicated exercise in this digital age, with the need to reach people everywhere they consume media. As the saying goes, all politics is local. And the fact is, on the grassroots level the people most likely to vote are those who use and trust the media that responds to the needs of their community on an ongoing basis—the Black Press (NNPA).

Particularly for candidates at the state and local level, support of the community and its businesses send a tangible message to voters that the candidate is willing to invest resources in the communities they hope to represent. The candidate needs to ask for our vote but in order to make that point effectively, the outreach must come early and often, with backup resources.

Without question, President Obama has the right vision and the best plan to move America forward, but the Democratic National Committee must do better in helping him get his message out to the people,

particularly Black people, to ensure that we are inspired to vote. The DNC must also value our vote. I believe, in reality, the Democratic “shellacking” could have been avoided. The Obama Administration, in a very short time, has had enormous successes—health care reform, the extension of unemployment benefits, and more—that touch lives in a substantial way. But who would know a story that hasn't been effectively communicated.

Democrats can't expect to win if the message of former President Bill Clinton doesn't ring clearly in their ears and brain. They also can't expect to win if they don't or won't go into the Black community and ask Black people for their vote.

When you look at the election, where Democrats advertised, went into the Black community, campaigned and asked for our vote, we won. The two best examples of this fact are California and Massachusetts however; there are a host of other critical states where candidates did not advertise, go into the Black community or ask the Black voters to come out and vote, and they lost. Democrats can't expect to win, if at the end of the day the verdict for Black Voters is ignoring them or taking them for granted. The strategy of “too little, too late” is not a viable and winning strategy.

Public School Financing – Broke, Busted and Disgusted



Marc Morial
President and CEO
National Urban League

To Be Equal:

“Simply put, many states do not provide sufficient funding or distribute that funding to address the needs of their most disadvantaged students and schools.” David Sciarra, Executive Director, the Education Law Center

With all the talk about firing poor teachers, closing the achievement gap and adopting “common core standards” for students,

one essential element of American education reform is too often overlooked – the inherently unequal and unfair system of state funding for public schools. A new study, co-authored by David Sciarra and Danielle Farrie of the Education Law Center and Dr. Bruce Baker of Rutgers University sheds new light on this problem. Their report, “Is Education Fair? A National Report Card,” reveals that most states are failing the test of fairness when it comes to public school financing. The authors state, and we agree, that “a fair funding system would be progressive in that funding would increase relative to the level of concentrated student poverty.” This would ensure that more funding would be available to students with greater needs and that all students would have the support necessary to achieve rigorous academic standards.

The study identified four “fairness indicators” – funding level, funding distribution relative to poverty, state fiscal effort and public school coverage. Based on those measures, only Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Iowa, Wyoming and New Jersey qualify as doing “relatively well” on

funding fairness. But even in those states, significant irregularities persist. According to David Sciarra, most states are failing. Instead of progressive funding, some states have a regressive system, meaning districts with higher poverty rates actually receive less funding than more affluent districts. And there are entire regions – the South and West – where public schools are chronically underfunded.

The National Urban League and many others in the civil rights community have long-noted the inequity in public school funding as a contributing factor to the achievement gap that finds half of African-American and Latino students dropping out of high school. Because school funding relies so heavily on state and local taxes, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, speaking at the National Urban League Centennial Conference in August admitted that “America's system of funding public education is inherently unequal.” He pointed out that “Over 40 states have faced legal challenges to their school funding system because they are so unfair.”

Secretary Duncan's response was the

establishment of an Equity and Excellence Commission, proposed by Congressmen Chakah Fattah and Mike Honda that is now working to “expose the inequities in funding, gather public input and issue policy recommendations on finance reform.” It is unconscionable that some public school students have access to computers and other state-of-the-art resources, while many of the most disadvantaged students barely have enough books and supplies in their classrooms.

This is an issue that will be decided largely outside of Washington at the local level. About 90 percent of public school funding comes from state coffers and funding decisions rest in the hands of local officials. If we believe that all our children deserve a quality education and that given the right support all of them can succeed, citizens must demand that their governors and state legislators end public school financing inequities now.

To read the full report, visit www.school-fundingfairness.org

Don't Overlook Turkey Safety At Thanksgiving

For most Americans, Thanksgiving wouldn't be complete without turkey. But cooking a big bird requires care, says LSU AgCenter nutritionist Beth Reames.

"There is no quality difference between a fresh or frozen turkey, although fresh turkeys have shorter shelf lives," Reames says. "By purchasing a frozen turkey, you can often take advantage of special sales."

To make sure you have enough turkey for the feast and for leftovers too, purchase at least one pound of uncooked turkey per person.

If you choose to buy a frozen bird, make sure you have adequate storage space in your freezer. If you buy a fresh turkey, be sure you purchase it only one to two days before cooking.

Proper thawing is important to prevent growth of harmful bacteria that may have been present prior to freezing a turkey. Reames says three safe ways to thaw a turkey safely are in the refrigerator at 40 degrees or less, in cold water and in a microwave oven.

When thawing a turkey in the refrigerator, allow 24 hours of thawing time for every 5 pounds of turkey, she says. Place a frozen turkey – still in its store wrap – in a baking sheet with a lip or a shallow pan on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator.

To thaw a bird in cold water, keep the turkey in the original packaging, place it in a clean and sanitized sink or pan, and submerge it in cold water, changing the water every 30 minutes.

For microwave thawing, follow the oven manufacturer's instructions. "Plan to cook the turkey immediately after thawing in a microwave because some areas of the turkey may become warm and begin to cook during microwave thawing," Reames says.

For safety's sake, wash your hands for 20 seconds in hot, soapy water after handling raw poultry or meat, she says. Also, be sure that utensils, plates, work surfaces, etc. have been thoroughly cleaned.

Keep raw foods separate from cooked or ready-to-eat foods to avoid cross-contamination, Reames warns. It is important that the juices from raw meat and poultry do not come into contact with food that will be eaten without cooking. Also, never place cooked food on an unwashed plate that previously held raw meat or poultry.

To cook a turkey safely, set the oven temperature no lower than 325 degrees, Reames says. To make sure a whole turkey has reached a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees, use a food thermometer to check the innermost part of the thigh and wing and thickest part of the breast.

An unstuffed turkey that weighs 14 to 18 pounds will need to cook approximately 3 3/4 to 4 1/4 hours in a 325-degree oven.

"The color of cooked poultry is not always a sure sign of its safety," Reames says. "Turkey can remain pink even after cook-

ing to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees. The meat of smoked turkey is always pink."

If you decide to stuff a turkey, prepare the stuffing and stuff it into the cavity immediately before it's placed in the oven.

When you cook a stuffed turkey, use a food thermometer to check the internal temperatures of both the turkey and the center of the stuffing, the nutritionist says. If the turkey is done and the stuffing has not reached 165 degrees, remove the stuffing from the turkey and place it in a greased casserole dish to continue cooking.

For optimum safety, cook stuffing separately from the turkey, Reames says. Cooking stuffing separately also will help prevent overcooking the bird.

Take care of leftovers promptly to keep foodborne bacteria from growing. Cut the turkey into small pieces and refrigerate



stuffing and turkey separately in shallow containers. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within three to four days and gravy within one to two days, or freeze these foods.


Consumers with food safety questions can call the toll-free U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 888-

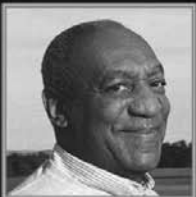




674-6854. The hotline is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern time Monday-Friday and from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

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City of New Orleans & Metro Disposal Reach an Agreement: \$15.99 per Household with Recycling

Negotiations with Richard's Disposal, Inc. remain in the balance.

On Monday, Mayor Mitch Landrieu announced that the City of New Orleans successfully renegotiated a contract with Metro Disposal, Inc., one of the city's sanitation collection contractors.

"This is a big win for New Orleans," Landrieu stated. "The negotiations were guided by three core principles. First, I honored my fiduciary responsibility to get a good value for taxpayer dollars at a price the City can afford. Second, I honored my belief that government has an obligation to support local businesses. And third, I honored my commitment to good customer service by providing curbside recycling, which we heard loud and clear, is a priority for our citizens."

"On behalf of Metro Disposal Incorporated I am pleased to announce that we have been able to reach an agreement with the City of New Orleans which will allow us to continue serving this community," said Jimmie Woods of Metro Disposal. "As good corporate citizens, we understand the financial challenges faced by our City and we have searched for ways to provide added value to the services we provide."

Woods continued, "Thus, we are also pleased to announce that under this new arrangement we will re-introduce curbside recycling to our coverage area. The



details of this new service will be rolled out over the next few weeks as we streamline the process for implementation. Like our slogan suggests, 'Just another day ... isn't just another day at Metro. We have to prove ourselves every day,' we are hopeful that the great citizens of this community will understand that we live by our creed."

The key points of the agreement are as follows:

\$15.99 per household monthly, including curbside recycling;

Metro and the City will collectively agree on a methodology for determining and monitoring the house count;

By advanced mutual consent of the parties, Metro will receive only a one-year extension through December 31, 2014, to its current contract reducing the 3-year extension granted by the previous administration;

If this contract was not renegotiated or rebid, the City would have paid \$18.15 per household without recycling in 2011 for Area 2.

Metro serves "Area 2" of the City (current house count 55,943), which includes New Orleans East, Lower 9th Ward, Gentilly, Lakeview, Faubourg Marigny, Bywater, Upper 9TH Ward, City Park, and Tremé. Richard's Disposal cur-

rently serves "Area 1" of the City (current house count 66,525), which includes Algiers, Uptown, Garden District, and Mid City.

In the midst of the City's budget crisis, Metro is the latest in a long list of contracts renegotiated by the City. In August, the Landrieu Administration successfully renegotiated the SDT Waste & Debris Services, LLC sanitation contract, saving the City \$110,000 a month or \$1.32 million annually.

In addition to the SDT contract, the Landrieu Administration has also renegotiated and cut millions from other contracts:

- Saved \$11 million on its contract with MWH by building capacity internally
- Saved \$2 million on contracted staff augmentation IT services
- Saved \$450,000 by Law Department reducing outside counsel
- Saved \$180,000 by utilizing volunteer hearing officers
- Saved \$300,000 by cancelling Finance Department audit contracts
- Saved \$300,000 by reducing PFM's Consulting and Budgeting for Outcomes contract
- Saved \$1 million by reducing the contract for basic street maintenance
- Saved \$250,000 on contracts for tree trimming and grass cutting for Parks & Parkways
 - Saved \$100,000 by eliminating the City Hall Xerox copy center

On November 4, 2010, after

more than four months of stalled negotiations, the City issued an Invitation to Bid for sanitation collection services in Area 1 (Richard's) and Area 2 (Metro), in order to prevent a break in sanitation services for New Orleans residents.

After reaching an agreement with Metro, the City will withdraw its Invitation to Bid for Area 2. The City will still accept bids for Area 1, since an agreement with Richard's has not been reached, and will amend it to include curbside recycling. Details on the amended bid will be available online and will be discussed at a pre-bid conference to be held on November 16, 2010, at 11 a.m. in the Purchasing Conference Room at City Hall. Responses to the amended bid will be due December 6th at 11 a.m.

The City Attorney communicated the City's best and final offer to Richard's Disposal through its attorney who had been negotiating with the City on behalf of both contractors for over four months. The proposal the City received from Richard's was not responsive to the City's best and final offer. The Landrieu Administration remains open to negotiations with Richard's Disposal and hopes to reach a resolution that is satisfactory. If not, the City will proceed with the Invitation to Bid to prevent a break in trash pick up for residents in 2011.

New Orleans Musical Legends to induct Louis Prima



New Orleans Jazz Legend Louis Prima

The "King of Swing" statue to be unveiled in Musical Legends Park

New Orleans Legends Park, Inc. announced that Louis Prima – legendary singer, bandleader, trumpeter and entertainer – will be inducted into the New Orleans Musical Legends Park, 311 Bourbon Street, on Saturday, December 4, 2010 at 5:30 p.m. The event will include the unveiling of a life-size, bronze statue of Prima.

The Musical Legend Park induction coincides with the 100th Anniversary of Prima's birth. Also known as the "King of

Swing, Prima was born in New Orleans on December 7, 1910. His career began with his seven-piece New Orleans style jazz band in the 1920s. He successfully led a swing combo in the 1930s, a big band in the 1940s, a Las Vegas act in the 1950s, and a pop-rock band in the 1960s. Prima passed away August 24, 1978.

"What a fitting tribute to commemorate the anniversary of Louis Prima's 100th birthday," says Dottie Belletto, Executive Director of the New Orleans Legends Park. "Louis Prima's musical talents spanned seven decades

and crossed several genres. But his deep love for music and audiences the world over was honed right here in New Orleans, the place of his birth."

The New Orleans Musical Legends Park is a cultural destination where people can learn about legendary New Orleans musicians while enjoying a great atmosphere and listening to great music. Past Musical Legends Park inductees are Al Hirt, Pete Fountain, Fats Domino, Chris Owens and Ronnie Kole.

Cornel West Says President Obama Has Failed the Poor

By Chris Levister
Blackvoicenews.com

NNPA Newswire- Praised for his "ferocious moral vision" Cornel West wasted little time living up to his reputation as one of America's most provocative public intellectuals. Speaking to a crowd of more than 1,000 people at Riverside City College (RCC) recently, the fiery orator took direct aim at President Barack Obama's policies toward the poor and working class calling them 'elitist and disappointing'.

"There's a Black man on top and millions of Black folks in the basement," said West.

"I applaud his brilliance and charisma, he changed the image of America, but where is the discourse on jobs for the working class and poor. He's giving speeches in Detroit but I won't hear him talking about that city's 25 percent unemployment among Black men. Job creation has been pushed to the margins," he said.

The culprit? Greed, says West, manifest in the action of players on Wall Street, "our televisual culture that's obsessed with superficial spectacle" and the education system "where the model becomes central."

He said the 'persistence of poverty produces levels of despair that deepen social conflict; the escalation of paranoia produces levels of distrust that reinforce cultural division'.

"There's a sense that the country is in paralysis. Americans like to believe they can solve any problem. When they're in paralysis they start blaming folk. Unfortunately, they blame the weak the scapegoat," said West in interviews before and after his lecture.

West urged President Obama to resist calls from Republicans, who this month took control of the House of Representatives and closed in on the Democrat's Senate majority.

"He loves consensus, he loves bipartisan agreement and that's fine, but when it's clear that the other side has absolutely no interest whatsoever in that kind of consensus, you got to draw a line in the sand and dig in," he said.

"He's got an active right wing out there, a recession inherited from Bush, an unpopular war in Afghanistan, massive unemployment and soaring poverty. With those kinds of weighty issues you can't move into a kumbaya mode

of existence. Instead, he's got to show backbone."

West said like Abraham Lincoln who led the abolitionist movement, like Franklin D. Roosevelt who led the labor movement, the President must create his own progressive movement to push his agenda for hope and change.

He warned that if President Obama fails to keep alive the legacy of Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, and other great civil rights leaders he will end up as "just another colorful caretaker of an empire in decline and a culture in decay."

Throughout his lecture, West, a



Cornel West, Ph.D

Professor of Religion at Princeton University, spoke of paideia. Paideia is Greek for education and instruction. "Students go to school and are still not educated. I don't hear our President talking about the new Jim Crow, the prison industrial complex. There is this pervasive notion that Black and Latino men are better off in the prison than in the classroom."

He had harsh words for the Black church "you see an ATM before you see the cross," he said. "There's a spiritual malnutrition tied to moral constipation, where people have a sense of what's right and what's good. They can't get it out because there's too much greed. It's just stuck. There's too much obsession with political and social reputation and addiction to narrow conceptions of success."

Following his talk, West sat on the stage with about 20 RCC students. He highlighted some of his philosophy on blues music, ideas on social justice, and universal love, which he called "spillover



Dr. Cornel West and President Barack Obama

love." He made connections between music, social problems, democracy, and philosophy.

He challenged the students to "Lift Every Voice." "You need to look beyond the words in the book and understand the true philosophy behind them," he said. "People need to find their own voice and not be an echo and be original."

He related this back to modern music and how some artists' are copying from the greats such as Duke Ellington and Nina Simone.

Many of the students and

members of the audience appeared awestruck by the colorful scholar, who has been described as an "intellectual provocateur". Not many of them knew that West was kicked out of school in the third grade. He refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag. "My uncle was lynched and then wrapped in the flag," West recalled. He credits the power of love in the West family. "They provided a positive outlook for the rage instilled in me."

When a student asked if America could ever be free of racism,

West struggled lacing his fingers his exuberant expression sat on pause.

"I pray for America. I pray hard for America. I pray for our President" he said, leaving the question unanswered.

"Race is the most explosive issue in American life precisely because it forces us to confront the tragic facts of poverty and paranoia, despair and distrust," he said as he signed autographs after the event.

West burst onto the national scene in 1993 with his bestselling book "Race Matters", a searing analysis of racism in American democracy. In his life story "Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud", he offers a compelling exploration of his heart behind the human mind.

He has published 19 other books and was an influential force in developing the storyline for the popular Matrix movie trilogy. Dr. West graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University and has a Ph.D. from Princeton.

"His viewpoints are radical and passionately felt," said retired Civil Rights Attorney, Evan Babitsky who traveled 90 miles to hear West.

"He is not afraid to speak frankly and from the heart," said Babitsky "While he presents many criticisms, he also offers many solutions. Not everyone will agree with his point of view, but if one of his objectives is to make people at least think about the problems he has dissected then he has succeeded admirably."

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